

3/09/2009 This Week in Congress

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March 9, 2009

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Wasteful Government Spending

This week, I voted to eliminate the 6.2 percent increase in federal spending for 2009. This included removing all earmarks contained in the Omnibus spending bill. However, it was an unsuccessful effort with the House voting 218 to 160 to reject this proposal.

Also this week, I sponsored legislation to help reduce wasteful government spending. I sponsored the Congressional Accountability Act, which would create a line-item veto to target wasteful earmarks and discourage lawmakers from

inserting frivolous spending into future legislation. It could eliminate billions of dollars in unnecessary spending by giving the President the authority to take out individual projects from massive bills. American families, businesses and farmers are facing significant economic challenges and need assurance that Congress is working to reduce irresponsible spending. The Congressional Accountability Act will be a useful tool to eliminate waste and ensure that taxpayers' dollars are wisely spent while reducing our country's debt.

Meeting with Kansas American Legion Members

On Tuesday, I met with members of the American Legion in my office in Washington, D.C. We discussed timely funding for VA health care and my efforts to assist Kansas veterans receive their VA benefits. I told the group I will monitor the implementation of my Rural Veterans Access to Care Act that was passed last year. The legislation will allow rural Kansas veterans to participate in a demonstration project to obtain health care in their home communities so that they avoid traveling long distances to VA facilities. [Click here to see a photo from our meeting.](#)

Thanks to the following American Legion members who attended the meeting: Commander Dave Rehbein; Steve Robertson; Tom & Phyllis Gregg of Ulysses; David Warnken of Hutchison; Lee Stolfus of Emporia; Pat Culver and James Hawthorne of Wichita; Dan and Sandy Roberson of Olathe; Frances Swensen of Junction City; Debra Lynch of El Dorado; Charles Yunker of Tecumseh; LaVeta Miller of Larned; Myrna Rogers of Augusta; and Melissa Cress of Topeka.

Attending Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Meeting

On Thursday, I attended a Transportation and Infrastructure Committee meeting where we forwarded two bills for the full House of Representatives to consider. The first was a water quality bill that provides low interest loans to states and localities to improve their wastewater infrastructure. The second was the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act which would help modernize the equipment the FAA uses to keep our skies safe. This bill did not include a user fee

proposal which would have been very harmful to the general aviation community and to the Kansas economy.

Renewed Urgency for Peace in Darfur

For six years, the people of Darfur, Sudan, have suffered violence, disease, hunger and dislocation. This week, the situation unfortunately got worse. After an arrest warrant was issued for Sudanese President Omar al-Bahir on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur, the president ordered more than a dozen relief agencies to shut down. The United Nations (U.N.) estimates that the closure of aid agencies will affect more than 4 million people living in Darfur.

The conflict has already contributed to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and displaced millions of people. The president's irresponsible and careless actions will cause more suffering and death. Without relief organizations working in Darfur, the U.N. believes more than a million people will be without food, health care and safe drinking water.

Since I traveled to Darfur in 2007, I have worked to raise awareness about this issue and have urged the United States and the international community to take action in Darfur so that there can be peace. We must make sure the Government of Sudan is held responsible for these retaliatory actions and that peace efforts intensify. I joined several of my colleagues this week in asking U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice to resist any attempts in the U.N. to delay action on the warrant for President al-Bashir and to appoint a Presidential Envoy to lead U.S. efforts to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur.

Attending University of Kansas Basketball Game

On Saturday afternoon, I had the opportunity to attend the University of Kansas basketball game versus the University of Texas as the guest of Dr. Michael Kennedy of the KU School of Medicine. Dr. Kennedy serves as the Assistant Dean for Rural Health Education in the School of Medicine and is also the Medical Director for Unit 43, which is the Family Medicine/Orthopedic Unit in the KU Hospital. We discussed the importance of medical education and rural health care.

I was glad to have the opportunity to see a great game and to also have the chance to visit with Chancellor Robert Hemenway and Dr. Kennedy. Congratulations to the Jayhawks who won the game 83-73 and also secured the 2009 Big 12 Championship. Thanks to Chancellor Hemenway, Dr. Kennedy and head basketball coach Bill Self for their hospitality.

U.S. Support of Israel is Needed

I spoke to Kansans who share a common interest in what takes place in Israel Sunday at the Kehilath Israel Synagogue in Overland Park. Although fighting between Israel and Hamas in Gaza has for the most part stopped, the underlying problems remain. Israelis living in southern Israel still face the threat of Hamas rocket and mortar attacks. As one of our strongest allies, it is critical Israel know it has the support and backing of the United States in its effort to make sure its citizens can live in peace and without fear of rocket and mortar attacks.

Former senator George Mitchell is now serving as special envoy to the Middle East and leading American efforts to encourage peace between the Israelis and Palestinians. I strongly hope both sides can agree to a sustainable and lasting peace that ensures Israel is safe from future attack.

In the Office

Greg Krissek and Doug Rivers of Colwich were in with ICM to tell me about the challenges and opportunities faced by the ethanol industry, as well as emerging technologies that will lead to the next generation of ethanol plants. Jim Daniels of Wichita was in with the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission to visit with me about domestic energy policy. Garrett Stewart of Washington was in with the American Veterinary Medicine Association to discuss the importance of the National Veterinary Medical Services Act to young veterinary medicine students that want to enter practice in rural communities upon graduation.

Lance Gomez of Hutchinson was in with Power Shift to visit with me about climate change legislation. Roland Rhodes of Gardner was in with the National Pest Management Association to talk about the importance of pest management to preventing disease and maintaining public health. Dana Peterson and Aaron Harries of Manhattan, David Schemm of Sharon Springs and Jay Armstrong of Muscatiah were in with the Kansas Association of Wheat Growers to tell me about the need for continued investment in wheat research. Rick Lane of Overland Park was in with National Home Infusion to visit.

Fred Cholick of Manhattan, Steve Irsik of Ingalls and Connie Kays of Pittsburg were in with the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges to give me an update on the need for additional investment in research and extension activities at land grant colleges like Kansas State University. Eric Haar of Lawrence was in to inform me of the newest developments with the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka. Bill Bolin of Wichita and Frances Garcia of Hutchinson were in with the South Central Kansas Economic Development District to advocate for support of the Economic Development Administration. [Click here to view a photo from their visit.](#)

Tom Rogge of Gardner was in with Cramer Sporting Good Manufacturers Association to discuss legislation that helps promote fitness and physical education in schools. Anita Raghavan of Wichita was in with Interfaith Ministries to tell me about the work her organization does. Julie Mulvihill of Topeka, Warren Hixson of Hutchinson and Shari Wilson of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Humanities Council to talk about programs in Kansas that are funded through the National Endowment for the Humanities.

David Foran of Kansas City, Doug Moorman of Leawood and Kyle Kosford of Topeka were in with the National Treasury Employees Union to discuss several issues important to federal workers. Connie Vogts of Liberal and Cindy Jones of Olathe were in with the School Nutrition Association of Kansas to talk to me about the importance of funding for child nutrition, school lunch and school breakfast programs. Dr. Bruce Nystrom, Dr. Carrie Crownower, Dr. Gary Hawley and Dr. Jason Deselms of Wichita; and David Barnum of Overland Park were in with the Kansas Psychological Association to brief me on mental health parity and billing opportunities for managing care.

The President of Cloud Community College, Richard Underbakke of Concordia was in to discuss the college's proposed wind energy training program. Lu Hangly of Hiawatha, Louise Lane of Meridan, Richard Jackson of Ottawa and Claudia Williamson of Centropolis were in with the Kansas Association of Community Action Programs to talk about the importance of federal support for social programs such as Head Start. Ed McKechnie of Pittsburg; J. Lee Ayers and Ralph and Norma Unger of Oberlin; Patty Dick of Topeka; and Greg, Tracy, Carter and Ryan Stacey of Lawrence stopped by to share information from the Arthritis Foundation.

Trista Newville of Concordia and Nathaniel Bergman of Overland Park were in with the American Osteopathic Organization to visit with me about the challenges of getting osteopathic physicians in rural areas. Phil Guries and Trey Mowery of Salina were in representing the Salina YMCA to advocate for community-wide involvement in combating obesity and to tell me about how YMCA programs can help. Naya Owusu and Stephanie Krebs of Overland Park, Chris Hahn of Lenexa and Michele Boeding of Kansas City were in with the Special Olympics to advocate for the Sports Empowerment Act and to discuss Project Unify which seeks to eliminate stereotypes. [Click here to view a photo from their visit.](#)

Wally Kearns of Topeka and Fred Willich of Manhattan were in with the Kansas Small Business Development Center (KSBDC) to tell me about the small business environment in Kansas and the KSBDC's efforts to identify, create and retain small businesses in our state. L.Scott Miller, Eddie Irani and Linda Cory of Wichita were in with the Kansas Space Grant Consortium to update me on their efforts to expand science and technology education opportunities in our state.

Jeff Seibel of Hays was in with Edward Jones to discuss the state of the financial services industry, optional federal charter legislation and arbitration. John Dozier of Topeka was in with the American Land and Title Association to visit with me about the title insurance industry and tax credits for home buyers. Lafe Bailey of Sabetha, Brad Gaddy of Overland Park and Susan Estes of Kansas City were in with the Mid-America Manufacturing Technology Center (MAMTC) to tell me about the Manufacturing Extension Partnership program and MAMTC's assistance to manufacturers in Kansas.

Students from the Kansas Intern Program who are spending their spring semester interning in Washington, D.C., stopped by to visit with me and learn more about my role as a Member of Congress. Thanks to Congressman Dennis Moore's wife, Stephene, for helping arrange this meeting. Galen Craghead of Alma also dropped by the office this week. Galen's son, Levi, is currently serving as a Page in the United States House of Representatives.

Greg and Tracy Stacey and their children Carter and Ryan of Lawrence visited my Washington, D.C., office this week to receive a tour of the United States Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry